DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 442 PS 030 414

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TITLE Teaching Reading in Homeschool.
PUB DATE 2002-05-00
NOTE 10p.
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Home Schooling; *Parent Student Relationship; Parents; *Parents as Teachers; *Reading Instruction; Reading Motivation

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the home-schooling trend and identifies reading instructional methods used by home-schooling parents. Interviews were conducted with 5 home-schooling families of children ranging in age from 1 to 14 years. Parents reported that they began reading instruction with their child at about age 5 and agreed that instruction in phonics or letter sounds was critical to learning to read. They also reported taking the cue from each child's readiness and interest in books. Children were gradually introduced to books by their parents. Parents reported that they planned to continue home-schooling until they found a school in which they wanted to place their child or until the child no longer wanted to participate. Some parents reported participating in reading incentive programs at the public library and restaurants catering to children. The paper asserts that home-schooling parents read to, with, and around children as often as possible and that this practice contributes to their success in teaching their children to read and to enjoy reading. (Contains 12 references.) (KB)

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May 2002

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Teaching Reading In Homeschool

Idalia Yambo

Abstract

America is experiencing a crisis in early childhood education. Evidently a significant number of children across the nation are experiencing difficulty learning to read. There seems to come a point where remediation becomes extremely difficult if not impossible. To discover a different perspective for reading the Homeschooling community was asked to share some pivotal pointers. Several families were interviewed and asked about when and how they teach their children to read and what they felt was the key to their success. They all agreed on one substantial point, letter sounds (phonics) were crucial. This process began with auditory discrimination of sounds in the environment at pre-school age and expanded to letter sounds, two letter words and finally sentences. These adults read to, with and around their children. If we collaborate as parents, caregivers, and educators we will change a negative into a positive.

Introduction

Homeschooling is a growing trend. More and more families are choosing this alternative method and thereby taking their children's education into their own hands due to a wide variety of reasons. Genuine disappointment in public school as well as a lack of faith that public education could realistically improve to an acceptable level has parents attempting to ensure the quality of their children's education in ever increasing numbers. Randi St. Denis published an article "Endangered Minds" where she admonishes the parents regarding the potential harm to young children from "television, computers and video games on thinking". She argues, among other things, that television "requires less mental effort than reading" (2001, p.1)

In, "Educational Curriculum for Young Children", she suggests that a strong early foundation in "Bible, Obedience, English & Speech and Physical Education" balanced with rocking, kissing, singing, and hugging are the key to later learning success. (2001, p.1-2) Amy Pedigo, Homeschool.com's Reading Advisor writes "For efficient readers,

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reading can be deceivingly effortless...." She cautions that this is not the case and careful study of the subject need be undertaken prior to becoming an efficient reading instructor. (2002, p.1)

Language Arts and Unschooling by Paula (no last name), advocates "reading good books" and suggests a variety of extended activities that can be done to bring home the concepts in the books to the students. She stresses "talking" as the key to comprehension of reading and watching activities. (2002, p.1) Billy Greer presents an article Unschooling or Homeshooling? comparing and contrasting the two schools of thought. (1998/2002, p.1-6)

Lets Go Learn, (March 16, 2002) lists "10 Easy Ways To Get The Reading Ball Rolling" and "Some Signs of Reading Readiness". Family Unschoolers Network answers the questions most frequently asked by those interested in learning about the topic. The National Reading Panel, (December, 2002) convened by the United States congress for the purpose of researching best practices in teaching young children how to read, does includes ideas such as staff development, assessment tools, teaching methods and materials.

American children are experiencing technical difficulties when it comes to learning to read. A recent study conducted by the National Reading Panel (December, 2002) has shown that 75% of children that are not proficient readers by third grade do not catch up. Four of ten or 20% of fourth graders do not read proficiently (December, 2002). On April 6, 2002 channel 11 news @ 10 reported that 75% of prison inmates have not completed High School and most of these can not read, this correlation does not seem to be incidental. In a time when all content area mastery is based on reading

comprehension these are dismal statistics. Standardized math exams require that students read and comprehend what is being asked of them. Then, once they complete their computations they need to provide a written explanation of how they arrived at this answer. As a new teacher in a New York City Public School in a low performing, "hard to staff", district these statistics are most disconcerting. The reasons for this tragedy vary greatly depending on what segment of the population you ask.

However students that are Homeschooled are doing so well according to Rebecca Winters, that in Purcellville, Virginia, Patrick Henry College has been designed specifically for students who have been "schooled at home". (2002, p.1-2) Colleges in general are beginning to more readily accept Homeschooled students. (2002, p.1-2) These discoveries prompted interviews of several Homeschooling families in an attempt to investigate what the "secret" of their reading success could be and what, if any, aspects one might be able to implement as a public school teacher.

The Interview

The interviews were conducted with several families who Homeschool and their responses were compared to see if in fact a common thread in their reports could be discovered. One might ask where these people can be found? (Each family was eager to put me in contact with another family they knew.) One family had two children and has lived in Philadelphia, for several years. The second family has five children and lives in the Catskills region of New York. The third family has two children and lives in Manhattan. The fourth family lives in the Bronx with three children and the last was a

Manhattan family with 2 children Collectively the children ranged in age with the youngest being a one year old and the eldest fourteen.

Results Of The Interview

I conducted my interviews in each family's home. Fathers and mothers were equally wiling to participate in my survey as they all seemed convinced that they were indeed giving their best to their children and seemed proud and happy to let the world know. I asked, "Why they decided to homeschool" and all of them were completely disenchanted with the problems within our school system. After all, newspapers regularly report on failing schools and these parents do their homework diligently.

I asked, "At what age did you begin reading instruction with your child?" and they generally began about five (kindergarten age) with actual letter sounds. They also reported taking the cue from each child's readiness and interest in books. However upon further questioning I discovered they had been exposing and gradually introducing books to the children in increments.

My final question was "How long do you plan to continue?" The answer came back until "we find a really good school" or "until he/she (the child) no longer wants to participate in this practice". One of the families expressed the hope to be able to continue through high school. I plan to keep in touch with them and see how far they go. Their oldest child is ten. (I will follow up with their family to see what happens in the next eight years).

I was encouraged to discover that these families without exception were only too pleased to open up and discuss their strong feelings regarding having control over not only what their children are being taught but also that these youngsters must be critical thinkers. They all stressed the value of a mind that hungers for information and a child who can find and critically analyze data. One father expressed concern that the public school teacher had to teach to the "average" student, consequently the gifted would be held back while the struggling could not catch up. Homeschooling for them is a means of tailoring lessons to focus on each child's specific needs.

On my very first interview I discovered the family had chosen to Homeschool their children because at the time they began to implement Homeschooling practices, they were living in the district I now teach in and refused to send their children to school there. Their nine-year-old boy won a reading award the summer that he was six for having read four hundred books. This family frequently visited the Public Library and the mother enrolled him in all of the reading incentive programs that she could find. One example of these was the Pizza Hut Book It program where children are given coupons for free personal pizza in exchange for a number of read books. In this case, the community in Pennsylvania they moved to had a vested interest in literacy and many places offered reading incentive programs such as this.

A Manhattan mother reported that her second grade daughter would borrow and read thirty books a week from the public library. This mother introduced reading by first taking her children to the zoo to listen for animal sounds. Then, she told her children that the letters, like the animals, all had their own sounds. At this point phonics instruction

was introduced. She tied in letter sounds to speech sounds to human sounds/words and ultimately written words.

Conclusion

It has been my experience that reading is one of the simple pleasures of life available to every socioeconomic class. I was born in the actual site where I now teach the hospital was torn down and a school built in its place. As a child although I was not read to at home, my mother was a factory worker and my father owned a neighborhood Mom and Pop candy store, I saw them read daily however, and sat and read with them as well. I had my own extensive library of Scholastic Books. We had a Bookmobile that came through our block weekly and I had my own library card and would look forward to borrowing new books with joy and excitement. Mr. Softee and the Bookmobile were the highlights of any given day.

The secret of Homeschool reading success seems to me to be something my own parents had a clue about. We must read to, with, and around children as much and as often as possible. Make sure they learn letter sounds thereby enabling them to decode new words with confidence. Begin early. No you do not want them reading the encyclopedia in pre-school but make sure they can tell you the sound each letter can make. If we collaborate as parents, caregivers and educators we can enable and empower our children to reach their maximum potential. Reading is contagious; pass it on!!!

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